

**PEACE OF MIND:** Wendell Henry, homeless in Santa Monica, appreciates being able to keep his clothes, guitars and other things at EZ Storage. "If you've got a sleeping bag, a change of clothes and your toiletries, you've already got quite a bundle," he said.

SPENCER WEINER Los Angeles Times

# A New Kind of Eviction Is Feared

A storage firm demands proof of address. Some say the policy could bar the homeless from stowing their property.

By BOB POOL  
Times Staff Writer

He was homeless, but he still had his pride. Not to mention his possessions.

So Gregory Wietrzychowski was unprepared for the welcome he received at a Santa Monica self-storage warehouse when he showed up to rent a small space

in which he could leave his belongings while he went to a \$7-an-hour telemarketing job.

Operators of DL Storage refused to provide him a space because he could not show them a utility bill that proved he had a place to live.

"They told me they were just following precedent, that every place was starting to ask to see utility bills," Wietrzychowski said. "They wouldn't explain why I needed to show one."

Some who are active in homelessness issues in Santa Monica say a backlash against the growing number of street people is behind the clampdown, which they worry could eventually lead to

the eviction of transients from storage facilities throughout the state.

"Veterans and women with children who are homeless need a help up, not a kick out," said writer Douglas Field, who says he was evicted from the storage space he was using after he publicly complained about the treatment of street people. "Do you want everyone homeless to be visible, carrying their belongings everywhere they go?"

DL Storage officials defend their policy as legal and necessary. They say they are in the process of requiring all of their more than 1,000 customers to show proof of residency by pro-

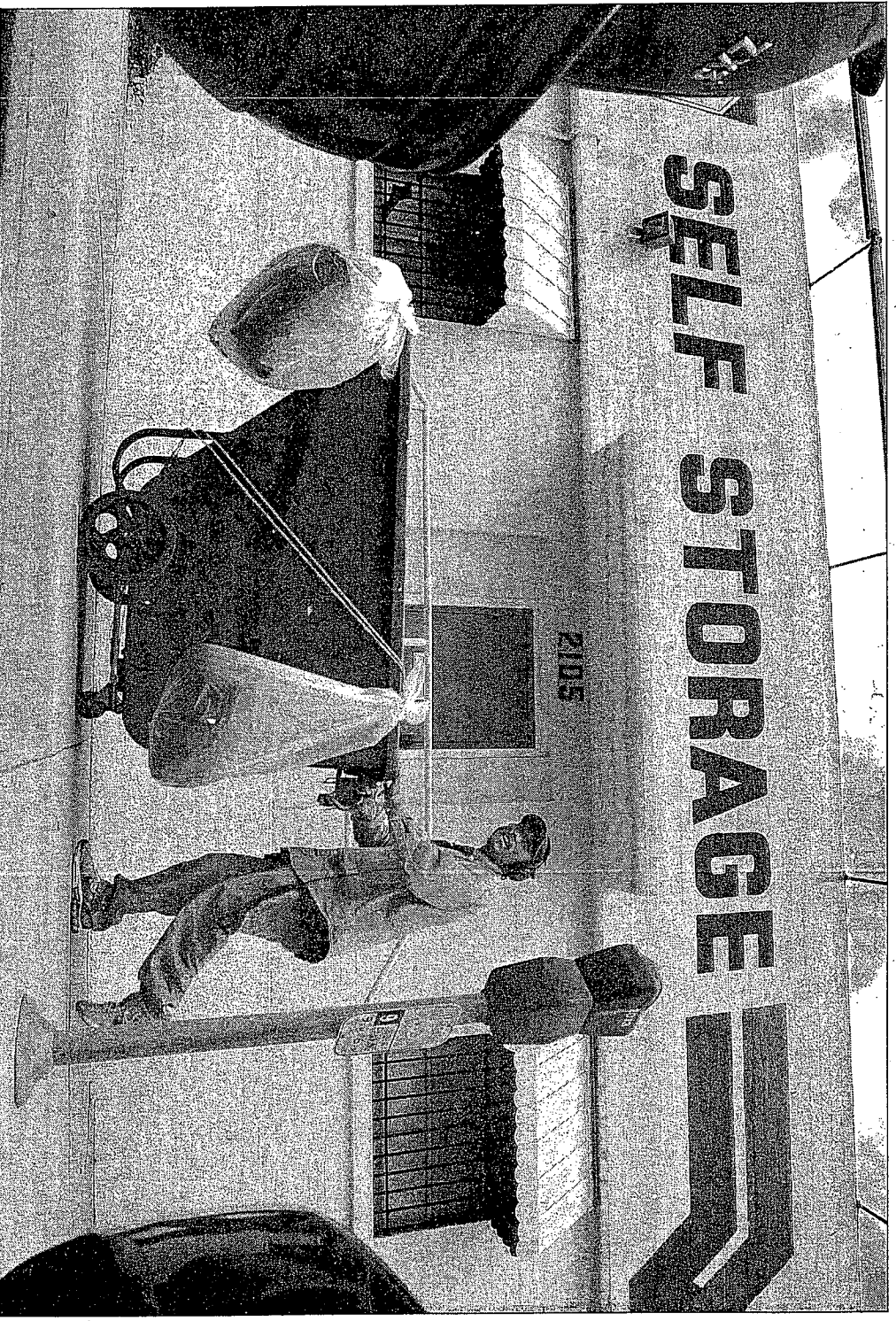
viding a gas or electricity bill or a credit-card statement with their address on it.

An address is needed so storage space customers can be contacted quickly in the event of an emergency, DL property supervisor Angela Harrison said. So far, no one has had to be evicted for failure to comply with the residency requirement, she said.

But a Los Angeles public interest law firm said it had received a complaint of one homeless person's reported eviction.

"Is this going to become a trend? That's what we're afraid of," said Louis Ratti, a project coordinator with Public Counsel, a

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**RELIABLE:** A man collecting recyclables walks past EZ Storage in Santa Monica. The company rents space to anyone who can pay the rent and is respectful of the property, said manager Carmen Williams, who added that the homeless "pay their bill on time."

Photographs by SPENCER WEINER, Los Angeles Times

# Homeless Say Some Storage Firms Demand Proof of a Street Address

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pro bono law office that specializes in civil rights cases.

"Storage facilities are fairly closely connected through industry newsletters and magazines. This could become a very large-scale problem. We see this as a broader, growing trend: to discourage homeless people from being in any specific spot."

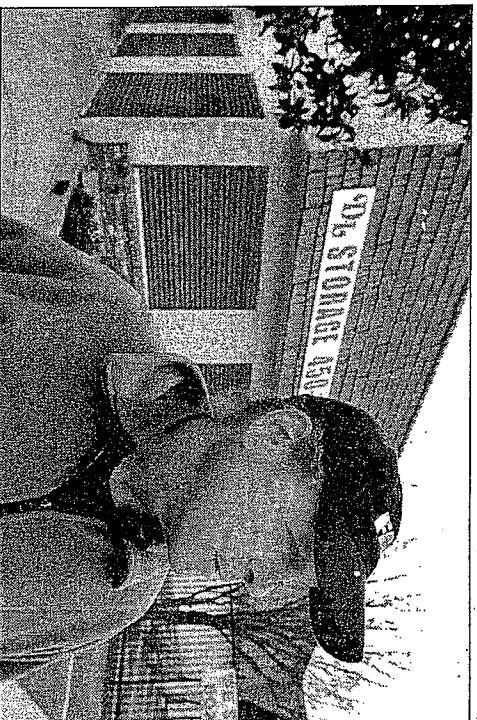
Rafii said the residency requirement is legal: "Unfortunately, being poor in America isn't a protected class. You can be discriminated against because you are poor."

Self-storage space — which can range from garage-size rooms to 4-by-4-foot lockers — is important to those living on the street or in vehicles, he said.

"The storage facility is many times the last vestige of their normal lives. It's the last thing they have that links them to what was a stable life. There's a strong emotional attachment to the possessions they store," Rafii said.

Rafii and others suggested that the Santa Monica warehouse crackdown corresponded with the recent opening of a Mercedes-Benz dealership's service facility next door to DL Storage. Also, a shower facility used by the homeless at Santa Monica's nearby Memorial Park was shut down.

Harrison said the storage firm's residency rule was unrelated to the car repair center's



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opening or the park showers' closure. She said Field was evicted because he was subletting his space without authorization.

She said that in the past, "we've had issues" with homeless people sleeping in their storage units or bathing in the facility's restroom.

Wietrzyszowski said he was seeking a storage locker close to the bus line he took to his telemarketing job when he was turned down at DL Storage.

"I was sleeping outside because I couldn't afford an apartment, even though I was working. People at work didn't know I was homeless. They'd really have

been shocked. I go to the laundry. I dressed nice. I wasn't scraggly," he said. His job ended when the telemarketing firm laid off 50 people in February.

An artist, Wietrzyszowski, 45, eventually found a Venice storage facility for his paintings, art supplies and other property. He said he became homeless after he moved to Santa Monica last year from France, where he had supported himself by painting. He tried his hand at painting on the Third Street Promenade before taking the telemarketing job.

"I was trying to get myself up from my situation," he said. "You

can't be carrying your stuff all over the place."

Wendell Henry of Santa Monica agrees.

Henry, 52, has been homeless for 20 years. He rents a 5-by-5-foot space from a Colorado Avenue self-storage company for his clothes, guitars and other possessions.

"If you've got a sleeping bag, a change of clothes and your toiletries, you've already got quite a bundle. When you leave that behind a bush, it might not be there when you come back," he said.

Henry said he opted for the homeless life after several business and personal relationship failures.

"You'd be surprised how easy it is to live on the streets," Henry said. "You have zero responsibility. And that's additive."

Carmen Williams, manager of EZ Storage where Henry rents his \$61-per-month space, said she has encountered several homeless people who were rejected by DL Storage.

"The homeless don't cause problems here. They pay their bill on time," Williams said.

That is true elsewhere too, said Rachel Banks, executive director of the California Self Storage Assn., a Santa Monica-based trade group that represents about 825 of the state's 3,900 self-storage outlets.

The homeless are good customers, she said, "because all of their worldly possessions are in there."